

Path Forward in the Fight Against Opioid Abuse Laid Out by Delaware State Officials

Opening of New Treatment Facilities, Tightened Regulation of Medication Assisted Treatment, and Additional Reforms In Prescribing Practices Among Recommendations



Attorney General Matt Denn announces next steps in battling opioid epidemic.

On the heels of a federal report last week that showed Delaware with the fastest rising rate of fentanyl-related overdose deaths in the country, government leaders and advocates gathered at the Delaware Department of Justice today to highlight critical next steps for the state in its battle against opioid abuse. Several of the recommendations made

today were based upon the release of a formal inventory of Delaware substance abuse treatment options commissioned by DOJ.

The treatment needs assessment released today by DOJ, independently written by Hornby Zeller Associates, found that Delaware is treating just over half of the individuals in need of opioid abuse treatment, with 11,000 persons in need of treatment and only 6,000 receiving it. The full treatment assessment report can be found [here](#).

Lt. Gov. Bethany Hall Long, DHSS Secretary Kara Odom Walker, State Senator Stephanie Hansen, State Representative David Bentz, state Public Health Director Dr. Karyl Rattay, state Police Chief Councils head and Camden Police Chief William Bryson and atTAack addiction founders Don and Jeanne Keister gathered with Attorney General Denn to release the treatment assessment, reflect on progress made in the last few years and discuss future steps in addressing the opiate crisis.

Attorney General Denn released a third annual plan from the Department of Justice on additional steps that should be taken to deal with an "opioid epidemic that is ruining lives, shattering families, and wreaking havoc on our criminal justice system." Denn noted that the DOJ plan is "quite specific in what should be done, who should do it, and on what time frame. Most of those time frames are quite aggressive. Because people are dying, and there needs to be a focus and urgency about our work.

Based on a calculation in the treatment assessment report that the state needs more treatment facilities, Attorney General Denn on Wednesday said he believes that the state should use economic development financing to help start them.

"The state has spent economic development funds on all sorts of initiatives over the past two decades, including the expansion and maintenance of other health care facilities,"

Attorney General Denn said. "Now it is time to use economic development funds to create jobs in an area where Delaware desperately needs them: substance abuse treatment."

The Department of Justice plan includes nine points:

- 1. The State Should Allocate \$4 Million In One-Time Funds To Expand the Availability of Quality Treatment Facilities That Allow for Extended Residential and Outpatient Treatment.**
- 2. Improved Monitoring and Regulation of Existing Medication Assisted Treatment Programs.**
- 3. Development of a Recovery High School for Delaware.**
- 4. Institutionalization of Naloxone Funding for First Responders.**
- 5. Addressing Co-Prescription of Benzodiazapenes and Opioids.**
- 6. Evaluation of Involuntary Treatment.**
- 7. Funding of Support Services to Ensure Coordination Between Actors in the Substance Abuse Treatment Community.**
- 8. Expanded Use of Naltrexone for Persons in Corrections System.**
- 9. Insurance Coverage For Alternative Pain Treatments.**

Details on these recommendations can be found in the DOJ plan [here](#).

The plan released Wednesday follows previous plans released by Attorney General Denn in 2015 and 2016 laying out steps for addressing what he has referred to as "the public health crisis of our generation." Progress cited Wednesday includes much stricter controls on the prescription of opioids, laws passed to help break down insurance and Medicaid barriers to getting people treatment, and dramatic increase, thanks to the hard work of advocate and the public safety community, in the number of police and other first responders who now carry Naloxone, which has been used hundreds of times to resuscitate overdose victims and prevent fatalities.

“An average of 20 Delawareans die of an overdose each month,” said Lt. Governor Hall-Long. “Each of those deaths represent the loss of a person with hopes, dreams, and families who loved them. As policy makers and leaders, we must fix our broken system, and save lives. This report highlights recommendations that will work jointly with the efforts of the behavioral health consortium in setting short-term and long-term strategies to combat the greatest public health epidemic of our generation.”

“Addiction is a public health crisis that has taken far too many lives and impacted far too many families in Delaware and across the country,” Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) Secretary Dr. Walker said. “As with any public health crisis, we need an ‘all-hands-on-deck’ approach. DHSS is working hard to evolve the treatment system so that it is comprehensive, coordinated, high-quality and person-centered. None of us can address this complex and deeply challenging issue alone, and I look forward to working with our many partners.”

“For someone lucky enough to have a person who cares about them, and who can get them into an in-patient detox facility, they’ve navigated the first step,” said Senator Hansen. “But discharge to the street after a week or less in treatment with no plan for the next stage in the treatment continuum, is a recipe for failure. It nearly guarantees a revolving door, and this happens a lot.”

“I am proud to stand alongside Attorney General Denn and support these efforts to improve our drug treatment policies,” said Rep. Bentz, who chairs the House Health Committee. “It’s vital that we all recognize that we are dealing with addiction and need to treat it as such. Having the Department of Justice’s support is a big step in the right direction. It’s going to take a concerted effort by all stakeholders to truly make a difference because we are facing such a substantial opponent in addiction.”

“The Division of Public Health has been hard at work taking a comprehensive approach to addressing the opioid crisis working with many partners through the Prescription Drug Action Committee, now the Addiction Action Committee,” said Division of Public Health Director Dr. Rattay. “An important priority for us is to engage individuals including a ‘warm handoff’ to treatment, or back into treatment, at opportune times – such as following an overdose or when an individual is involved in the criminal justice system. Building upon the Help is Here website and campaign, we join our other colleagues at DHSS to work with the community to reduce barriers to accessing treatment.”

“I’m not a doctor, I’m not a lawyer, but I am a dad with a little bit of experience. However, I am an educator,” said atTAcK addiction member Don Keister, “and I can tell you this recovery high school is needed.”